

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAR ES 02353 131238Z

47

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-04

RSC-01 USIA-15 PRS-01 SP-03 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06

SIL-01 AID-20 DRC-01 /092 W
----- 111401

R 130900Z JUL 74

FM AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5870

INFO AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE DAR ES SALAAM 2353

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EGEN, ETRN, PFOR, XW

SUBJECT: MEETING OF EAST AFRICAN COMMUNICATION COUNCIL
POSTPONED INDEFINITELY DURING CRITICAL PERIOD

1. GOVERNMENT-OWNED DAILY NEWS OF JULY 12 AND 13 HAS DISCUSSED AND EDITORIALIZED "SUDDEN ANNOUNCEMENT" THAT MEETING OF THE COMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL OF THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY (EAC) HAS BEEN POSTPONED. MEETING WAS SCHEDULED TO BE HELD ON ZANZIBAR JULY 11 AND NO EXPLANATION OFFERED IN FIRST REPORTS OF POSTPONEMENT NOR WAS NEW DATE SET. REPORTING DID NOTE THAT THE MEETING WAS TO DISCUSS (A) "KENYA'S REFUSAL TO REMIT 22.4 MILLION SHILLINGS TO EAC HARBOURS CORPORATION" AND (B) "THE SALARY CRISIS FACING WORKERS OF EAC RAILWAYS CORPORATION IN KENYA AND KENYA'S HOLDING OF 12.9 MILLION SHILLINGS BELONGING TO RAILWAYS CORPORATION IN A SECRET ACCOUNT IN NAIROBI."

2. IN SAME ISSUE OF DAILY NEWS, A HASTILY-WRITTEN UNSIGNED EDITORIAL BY MANAGING EDITOR BEN MKAPA, DESCRIBED THE "INDEFINITE POSTPONEMENT" OF THE COUNCIL MEETING AS "A SETBACK TO THE PROGRESS OF THE COMMUNITY CORPORATIONS." REVIEWING RECENT PROBLEMS OF EAC CORPORATIONS, MKAPA NOTED MEETING POSTPONEMENT IS "REPREHENSIBLE" AND BRINGS RAILWAYS CORPORATION "EVEN CLOSER TO THE VERGE OF COLLAPSE," FOLLOWING "INCONCLUSIVE" COUNCIL MEETING IN JUNE.

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EDITORIAL, AFTER NOTING THAT "MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL

MUST KNOW ...SERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES CHARACTERISING THE AFFAIRS OF THE CORPORATION" CLOSES WITH THE QUESTION "WHAT CAN BE SO URGENT IN THE PARTNER STATES TO KEEP THESE PEOPLE FROM MEETING?"

3. NEXT DAY DAILY NEWS REPORTS EAC SECRETARY-GENERAL MTEI AS SAYING POSTPONEMENT WAS AT REQUEST OF "PRESIDENT'S OFFICE IN KENYA...SO THAT KENYAN COUNCIL MEMBERS COULD PARTICIPATE IN NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT SEATS." MTEI ALSO REPORTED US SAYING THAT "ARRANGEMENTS WERE BEING MADE TO HAVE COUNCIL CONVENED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE."

4. COMMENT: SUDDEN POSTPONEMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL AT THE REQUEST OF KENYA COMES AT A TIME WHEN REPORTS FROM NAIROBI INDICATE THAT KENYA IS USING CURRENT FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES OF THE RAILWAYS CORPORATION AS PRETEXT TO WITHDRAW ITS PORTION OF THE SYSTEM FROM COMMUNITY CONTROL. ALSO, THE FAILURE OF THE COMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL TO MEET SHOULD BE LINKED WITH THE FAILURE OF THE EAST AFRICAN AUTHORITY TO MEET -- REPORTEDLY BECAUSE OF A SERIES OF POSTPONEMENTS INITIATED BY KENYA'S PRESIDENT -- OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS AS THE FINANCIAL PROBLEMS OF THE EAC HAVE BECOME LARGER.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MEETINGS, COMMITTEES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 JUL 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: martinml
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974DARES02353
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740188-0322
From: DAR ES SALAAM
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740751/aaaabrnz.tel
Line Count: 83
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: martinml
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <29 AUG 2002 by shawdg>; APPROVED <19 FEB 2003 by martinml>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEETING OF EAST AFRICAN COMMUNICATION COUNCIL POSTPONED INDEFINITELY DURING CRITICAL PERIOD
TAGS: EGEN, ETRN, PFOR, XW, EAC
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005